

Ignorance Isn't Bliss

It is time for us to stop making excuses for being ignorant about events around us.

Oh, I never read the newspapers. All they talk about is bad news!”

“You should never trust what you read in the newspapers. They’re all biased!”

These are comments I have heard dozens of times as a reporter. They have come from evangelical Christians who feel no need to apologize for their ignorance of what is going on in the world.

Of course, both statements contain part of the truth. Newspaper or TV news is always some sort of bad news. The “bad” or unusual is seldom far from any definition of news.

You also can assume some bias from reporters. Those in the mainstream, secular media tend to be religiously agnostic, politically and culturally liberal, and seldom informed about religious issues.

But as an excuse for not keeping up with what is happening in the world, these comments are absurd. You might as well never go outside because a bird might drop something on your head or never cross the street because pedestrians have been known to get run over.

The world around us is constantly moving and being

transformed. Customs, fashions and habits of life change all the time. Occasionally, dramatic national or international events arise that significantly affect everyone's life.

How as Christians are we supposed to know how to interpret these events to ourselves—much less to others—if we haven't a clue what is happening? Newspapers and television are never perfect, but there isn't a whole lot out there other than the Internet (not always reliable itself) to tell us what is going on.

The influential 19th century English Baptist, Charles Spurgeon, often used to say he lived with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. Evangelist Billy Graham has made it a habit through the years to read several newspapers every day, including some from overseas. He found that it was impossible to address any culture credibly unless he knew what was going on within it.

Yet still you find some earnest evangelical (and often charismatic, too) Christians who think that devotion to Jesus is inversely related to knowledge of current events. The more ignorant, the more sanctified, they must think.

This is both nonsensical and dangerous. It implies to fellow-Christians that if they are well-informed they probably are not praying enough. It gives the impression to non-Christians that Christianity is a form of head-in-the-sand escapism that has nothing to say to the realities everyone else seems to be able to recognize as needing to be addressed.

One explanation of this phenomenon is theological. "Premillennial dispensationalism"—even if in the end it is

true as an explainer of the end-time events preceding Christ's return—has since its inception in the 19th century encouraged Christians to expect things in every arena of life to get worse, not better.

Here's a thought. If 19th century British evangelical William Wilberforce had believed this doctrine, do you suppose he would have campaigned 46 years until his death in 1833 to abolish slavery and change the moral condition of England? I don't think so.

Yet it's probable that evangelicals in the United States since the 1970s have spent more to consume fictional speculation about the end times than to invest in the hard work and long-term preparation that are needed to change our culture. I'm all in favor of fiction. What I have no time for is speculative paranoia, fictional or nonfictional.

It really is time for us to stop making pathetic excuses for being ignorant about events around us. It requires from us hardly any financial outlay, since much of the content of national newspapers can be read free of charge on their Web sites. Buying a book occasionally and reading it helps, too.

My prayer is really very simple: Could we Christians change our entire attitude toward knowledge? God created knowledge, so it must be good—and it's certainly better than ignorance.

And could we just start reading the newspapers? That would be a small, but wonderful, first step.